

Message Text

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43

ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00

DODE-00 DOTE-00 EB-07 INR-07 NSAE-00 CIEP-01 FAA-00

SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02

SS-15 PRS-01 MC-02 /077 W
----- 021669

O P 171211Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6368

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

AMCONSUL IBADAN

FAA BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 9431

LONDON FOR RAY SEITZ AND AMABASSADOR EASUM

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CGEN, EAIR, CASC, PINS, NI, FR, US

SUBJECT: CESSNA AIRCRAFT AND PILOTS DETAINED IN NIGERIA

REF: (A) STATE 203493 (B) PARIS 23758 (C) LAGOS 9404 (NOTAL)

1. PERMSEC'S OFFICE IN MEA (MUST BE PROTECTED PLEASE) TOLD
POLCOUNS TODAY THAT MEA EXPECTED DECISION TO RELEASE PLANES
AND PILOTS WOULD BE MADE TODAY. OFFICIAL SAID THAT MAIN DIF-
FICULTY IN RESOLVING THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN SUSPICION IN HIGH
LEVELS OF FMG THAT PLANES WERE ACTUALLY INTENDED FOR USE IN
ANGOLA AGAINST MPLA OR FOR SMITH GOVERNMENT IN RHODESIA.
HE EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE SATISFACTION THAT USG HAD NOT
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BECOME INVOLVED IN MATTER COMMENTING THAT AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT

WOULD ONLY HAVE FURTHER MUDDIED WATERS. OFFICIAL SAID MEA'S RECOMMENDATION TO RELEASE PLANES AND PILOTS BASED ON FOREIGN POLICY DECISION NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH KINSHASA.

2. IN VIEW THIS INTELLIGENCE, BELIEVE IT BEST FOR MOMENT TO WAIT AND SEE IF IN FACT FMG DOES RELEASE PLANES AND PILOTS WITHIN NEXT DAY OR TWO. ONCE PLANES RELEASED, HOWEVER, SUGGEST REQUEST FOR OVERFLIGHT CLEARANCE BE MADE FOR REMAINING TWELVE PLANES. WHETHER IT BEST FOR ZAIRIAN OR FRENCH EMBASSY HERE OR CESSNA REPRESENTATIVE IN NIGERIA TO HANDLE MATTER, WE WILL LEAVE UP TO CESSNA AND THE ZAIRIAN GOVERNMENT. WE DO NOT BELIEVE IT WOULD BE POLITIC FOR USG TO CARRY THE BALL GIVEN SITUATION HERE AT MOMENT. WHOEVER IS CHARGED WITH OBTAINING CLEARANCE, PLANES SHOULD NOT RPT NOT ATTEMPT ENTER NIGERIAN AIRSPACE WITHOUT CATEGORIC ASSURANCES THAT ALL IS IN ORDER. IF REQUEST FOR OVERFLIGHT CLEARANCE SEEMS TO RUN INTO INORDINATE DELAY, WE WOULD STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT PLAN TO FERRY PLANES ACROSS NIGERIA BE DROPPED AND THAT COMPANY ADOPT NEW FLIGHT ROUTE WHICH SKIRTS NIGERIA.

3. AS EXAMPLE OF SOPHISTICATION WITH WHICH MEDIA ARE VIEWING INCIDENT, AUGUST 17 OBSERVER (PUBLISHED IN BENDEL STATE, WHERE PLANES LANDED) HAS BANNER HEADLINE, "MYSTERY PLANES LATEST... NUMBERS LOOK FAKE AS RAINS INCREASE." CAPTION DESCRIBING FRONT PAGE PHOTO READS AS FOLLOWS: "PICTURE SHOWS THE 'FAKE' REGISTRATION NUMBER OF ONE OF THE PLANES, PEELING OFF AS RESULT OF HEAVY RAINFALL. THE NUMBERS WERE MERE COLOURED PAPER, STUCK ON THE PLANES," CAHILL

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Message Attributes

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